

Structure--an allegory

The characters in an allegory are not real, but they are all the more real for that. They are the selves that stay hidden inside, deep at the core, the selves we fear, the selves we love, the selves we hide from others. Their behaviour is whimsical, juvenile, even ridiculous, but their interactions structure our lives and give it meaning, the meaning we are always striving for, but can never quite figure out where it could possibly come from. That structure rules but does not dictate, is powerful enough to make purpose out of randomness, but remains nevertheless so hard to capture that the allegory itself is the only truth that remains.

Peter Taylor (Rabbit)
Judy Wearing (Squirrel)



CMESG/GCEDM 40th Anniversary Meeting

The Isabel Bader Centre for the Performing Arts

Queen's University

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MUSIC: Free to be

Rabbit dances to music.

Music ends and Rabbit talks as he walks to podium.

RABBIT:

Quand j'étais un petit lapin, je pouvais danser toute la nuit. Mais je ne dansais presque jamais. Tabernacle!

But when I did dance, that was my song! It talked of a land where I was free to be myself, and it painted that land as a light and joyful place. Now as an elder rabbit I know a lot more about that land. I know it is not what it seems to be. I know it *lies* well beyond the garden wall, and yes, it does indeed “lie” in both senses of the word. That’s a powerful pun that we will meet again later. Certainly the glimpses I have of the world beyond the wall are chaotic and scary—not at all the land of my childhood.

[Enter **Squirrel**. She walks to her “podium.”]

The world outside is where Squirrel lives. The garden wall is quite high but I can see her when she is in the branches. She scampers out to the end and leaps onto the power line over to the next tree. Sometimes though she just sits on the branch and looks down into the garden. Even after the snow comes and there is ice on the branches, she is up there heading for the power line. I can hardly watch.

Sometimes the garden gate gets left open and I can see the rough grass and dandelions in the park across the street. Trees but no bushes—nowhere to hide! A busy road with trucks and squealing tires. Dogs sometimes off the leash. I hardly dare to venture out. What if the gate closed before I got back in?

But when I’m safe in the garden, I dance to that song.

SQUIRREL:

I’ve been in this tree for a while. It’s alright. There’s a good view of the stars. Good access to power lines, though I don’t trust them – I have learned not to trust much in this world. Thirteen times last night a bat touched down at the entrance to my nest, and each time I woke up and sank deeper into the tree. Once I heard the gentle click of claws on the bark--not a bat but an owl.

It’s the dogs I hate most. They want a piece of me, purely for amusement. I’m not fast, like Rabbit, and I have few places to hide, but I can change direction on a dime. That’s how I’ve survived this long.

From the high branches I can see Rabbit in his garden. He munches on carrot tops warily. Once in a while Mr. McGregor appears with his wheelbarrow and hoe, and then Rabbit bolts to the bushes. But it never looks as though there is any real threat. It’s more like a chess game on an orderly board with brown and green squares. I envy Rabbit, with his protective wall and his secure source of food. I wonder what I might accomplish if I did not have to worry so much.

RABBIT:

I remember clearly that first day of term. I got there early, before 8—I wanted to make sure my room was set up-- but already there were students at their lockers, milling the halls.

I have to say I was nervous—university I understand, and they're just one year younger than my first-year students, but it seemed so different here, and I had to wonder why on earth I hadn't just stayed in my comfy well-worn office chair. Well a bunch of us are thinking about the school curriculum, trying to give it some sort of new life, and if you're going to play that game, I guess you gotta spend some time in the trenches.

And suddenly—on my way to my room--there was Squirrel. Could it be?— surely not, but she looked at me and said "Rabbit?" just as surprised as I was. She must be a high-school teacher—I'd always wondered what she did. But no, turns out she's here just for the term, like me.

Crazy 'cause we live right across the street from one another, though we've never actually talked, perhaps nodded to one another from time to time. But after the term got going we'd sometimes walk home together and share the happenings of the day. If it wasn't for the school we'd probably still only be nodding over the garden wall. Funny how things happen. I think there's a structure to the events of our lives—have you ever noticed?

That was early February, four months ago. Four months. I'm not at the school anymore. Didn't quite make it to the end of term. [shakes his head]

They're good kids. I miss them.

SQUIRREL:

Odd running into Rabbit like that but nice to have someone to talk to on the walk home. No surprise to find out he's a math prof—he always seems to be counting carrots, measuring lettuces, estimating his distance from the bushes. I respect him for stepping out of his university life, trying to have an impact out of the ordinary.

I am aware, as usual, that he has a safe home to go to. I, however, am out on a limb. If I'm going to teach for a career, this maternity gig is my chance to show what I can do. I am pretty pumped about teaching adolescents. They're so adoringly unpredictable. All that zest for life, wearing their emotions on their sleeves, the self-consciousness. But at the same time, scared. **I relate.** And this is English 10, college stream. Lots of kids who are not at all sure about English, but have to take a provincial test this year anyway. If they don't pass, they don't get a high school diploma.

Maybe, just maybe, I'd find it this time. A tree I can call home. A place to fit in, where I can make a difference. Like my high school teachers did for me. They didn't treat me like dirt because I smelled like cigarette smoke and lived on the wrong side of the tracks. They gave me good grades. Because I deserved them. Now I'm grown up, maybe I can help other young squirrels find their way in the world. And get paid for it! All the nuts I can eat. My own house! Perhaps even -- *a garden.*

RABBIT:

I wanted to do something really different from what seems to happen in math class--not just different examples and problems—a whole new structure. So that it wasn't about what you learned but what you could make—with your hands, so to speak. 'Cause it seemed to me that math really didn't have any concrete meaning to most of them, not all of them but most of them. See the ones that get it, the few that actually get it, well I know those kids and it doesn't matter what you do with them as long as the quality is high, because they just grab hold and run with it, and come back later with questions. It's the others I worry about. Long ago they missed some critical connection and they can't make sense anymore. As a result they lower their standards of what it *means* to make sense, and it's really hard to recover from that.

I wanted them to really care about what we were doing! All of them. I wanted them to locate mathematics at the centre of their lives. I wanted to capture them—no that's confusing 'cause I wanted to set them free.

Funny, that. I wonder if that's where things went wrong.

SQUIRREL:

I love words. Reading, and writing. And I intended all along to help this English 10 class pass their provincial literacy test, but I've also wanted to show them how they might use words to find value in themselves and their ideas. I wanted to give them stories that resonate with soul and sinew. I wanted to wrap them in the emotional threads that bind us all. In joy, fear, and sorrow, we are the same. Each and every one of us-

This English 10 is my favourite class of all time. One third of the students have individualized learning plans, learning disabilities, behavioural issues. Several are repeating. Josh, in the back refused to participate at first. He handed in quizzes blank without his name. But I love this class because they're hungry. They gobble up attention, affection, like it is ice cream. I never tire of the sparkle in their eyes when I've found them a poem that speaks to them – you know what I mean – right – to – them. Like it was written – just –for – them. In less than a month, Josh was eager. And the goth girl had put away her phone and her makeup kit. Kevin told me shyly he'd quit smoking. I can do it. I CAN make a difference

RABBIT:

At the beginning Sandra was in the classroom a bit—getting me into the routine.

Sandra's the Principal, but she used be a science teacher. It's a good class, it is. They're a crazy bunch, but they're teenagers—it's their job to be crazy. I coulda used a bit more of that when I was a kid.

In a way I think I was getting a bit frustrated. Beginning of June—term almost over—and what had I accomplished. Had they actually discovered what mathematics really was? Had I actually affected their lives in any significant way?

Honestly, I don't know how the poem got out of my knapsack and into my hands. It's a deep mystery. I mean it's always in the inside pocket, been there ever since I first read it years ago and it took such hold on me. I'm not sure why. Layers of meaning. It's not what it seems, not at all what it seems and I think that was not well understood.

Look—maybe I'll read you a bit of it. It's by Bronwen Wallace.

She's a Kingston poet. I knew her—a little bit.

Maybe you've seen some of her work.

She wrote this in 1988. *The woman in this poem.*

The woman in this poem
lives in the suburbs
with her husband and two children
each day she waits for the mail and
once a week receives
a letter from her lover
who lives in another city
writes of roses warm patches
of sunlight on his bed
Come to me he pleads
I need you and the woman
reaches for the phone
to dial the airport
she will leave this afternoon
her suitcase packed
with a few light clothes

La femme de ce poème
vit en banlieue
avec son mari et ses deux enfants
elle attend chaque jour la poste
une fois par semaine elle reçoit
une lettre de son amant
qui habite une autre ville

Il parle de roses, de coins
ensoleillés sur son duvet
'viens' il supplie
'j'ai envie de toi' et la femme
prend le telephone
prête à composer le numéro de
l'aéroport
elle partira cet après-midi
sa valise faite

SQUIRREL:

Foraging is always fun. This time, I was in *Wayfarers*—the used bookstore down town? running my eyes across the rows of titles. I found something, buried in a pile, waiting for me. *True and False*.

Hairesee and common sense for the actor – by David Mamet

I'm not an actor – in the usual sense of the word. But I opened it.

And so we might ask ourselves, you and I, what is character? Some say character is the external life of the person onstage, the way that person moves or stands or holds a handkerchief. But that person onstage is *you*. It is not a construct you are free to amend or mold. It is *your* character which you take onstage.

Et alors, nous pourrions nous demander, vous et moi, qu'est-ce qu'un personnage? Quelqu'un pourrait dire que le personnage est la vie extérieure d'une personne sur scène, la façon dont elle marche ou dont elle se tient debout ou dont elle tient un mouchoir. Or, la personne sur scène, *c'est vous!* Ce n'est pas une construction que vous êtes libre de modifier ou de mouler. *C'est votre* personnage que vous amenez sur scène.

A person does not decide to be a squirrel. She is born into it. I was five years old, in Kindergarten, when I wandered out of the schoolyard, onto the streets. I had a dentist appointment. Mom was picking me up and I waited on the front steps for her but she never arrived. So, I decided to walk home, even though I did not know how to get there. But I made a start, I was going to try. I walked through unfamiliar streets lined with giant trees. [slow down] A white pickup truck stopped beside me. "Are you lost?" the man asked. "Get in; I'll drive you home."

[Pause.] I got in.

RABBIT:

I've always wondered who "the woman" is and why she is so huge in my life, so much at the centre of my being. I think that at some level I am starting to understand. In a strange way the events of this past week have nurtured my understanding.

When we left her she was reaching for the phone.

But as she is dialing
the woman in this poem
remembers the pot-roast
and the fact that it is Thursday
she thinks of how her husband's face
will look when he reads her note
his body curling sadly toward
the empty side of the bed
She stops dialing and begins
to chop onions for the pot roast
but behind her back the phone
shapes itself insistently
the number for airline reservations
chants in her head
in an hour her children will be
home from school and after that
her husband will arrive
to kiss the back of her neck
while she thickens the gravy
and she knows that
all through dinner
her mouth will laugh and chatter
while she walks with her lover
on a beach somewhere...

Mais en composant le numéro
la femme de ce poème
se souvient de la casserole
et que c'est jeudi
elle imagine le regard de son mari
se transformant en lisant la note
seul sur le lit, affaisé
Elle intèrrompt son appel et
commence
à hacher un onion pour la casserole
mais dans son dos le téléphone
se moque d'elle
et le numéro de compagnie aérienne
tourbillonne sans cesse dans son
esprit
Dans une heure ses enfants seront
de retour de l'école
son mari arrivera peu après
et lui baisera la nuque
pendant qu'elle s'affaire à la sauce
elle rira et bavardera facilement au
souper
tout en marchant
sur la plage avec son amant

SQUIRREL:

Things have not changed much. I still wander into the unknown. It has crossed my mind that I design it **to be so.**

In the outside, there is loneliness. But there is also a unique, holistic perspective, as the astronaut peering at the Earth from his metal shell well knows.

In the outside, it is easy to be creative – the difficulty is being accepted. Humanity's most creative souls have been APART. The devil is an artist.

In the outside, it is easy to get lost. There are dogs in the park and wolves in the woods, and men in white trucks who hurt little girls.

But not that time. That man in that white truck who stopped beside the kindergarten me was kind. He drove me home. On the way, he gave me a lesson on eight-track player technology, before dropping me off at the front door of my apartment building.

Mamet's book was good. I read all through my dinner, peanut butter, a cucumber, a hunk of blue cheese. I folded over the corners of pages, made notes in the margins with a 2B pencil. I don't agree with everything he has to say, but the guy has balls. Great big acorns of wisdom and he isn't afraid to share them, even if he pisses off a few people along the way. His talk of playwrights and actors, the stage. None of it is my world, but still so familiar. The roles we play in life, our audience. What really counts as success. And who gets to decide.

The actor has her own trials to undergo and they are right in front of her. Her challenge is not to recapitulate, to *pretend* to the difficulties of the written character; it is to open the mouth, stand straight, and say the words bravely—adding nothing, denying nothing, and without the intent to manipulate anyone, herself, her fellows, the audience.

Et alors, nous pourrions nous demander, vous et moi, qu'est-ce qu'un personnage? Quelqu'un pourrait dire que le personnage est la vie extérieure d'une personne sur scène, la façon dont elle marche ou dont elle se tient debout ou dont elle tient un mouchoir. Or, la personne sur scène, *c'est vous!* Ce n'est pas une construction que vous êtes libre de modifier ou de mouler. *C'est*

RABBIT:

I got an email that night from Sandra. Look, I've got someone else to take the class tomorrow. No big deal—nothing to worry about,—but it would probably be better if you took a few days off. A few parents, that's all, and the school needs to make a statement--clear the air. But look, please give me a call as soon as you get this. Please. It's okay--really. Sandra.

I didn't call her. I DID want to talk to her—mostly tell her something about the students—what they said, what they did, what they talked about. And maybe ask her what the poem meant to her. But not by phone; it wouldn't work by phone. And maybe not quite yet.

She puts the onions in the pot
and turns toward the phone
but even as she reaches
she is thinking of
her daughter's piano lessons
her son's dental appointment...

Her arms fall to her side
and as she stands there
in the middle of her spotless kitchen
we can see her growing
old like this
and wish for something—anything—
to happen we could have her go
mad perhaps and lock herself
in the closet crouch there
for days her dresses withering
around her like cast-off skins
or maybe she could take
to cruising the streets at night
in her husband's car
picking up teenage boys
and fucking them in the back seat...

we can even imagine
finding her body
dumped in a ditch somewhere
on the edge of town

Elle ajoute les onions à la casserole
se tournant vers le téléphone
lorsqu'elle tend la main pour décrocher
elle pense au leçons de piano de sa fille
et au rendez-vous de son fils chez le
dentiste

Vaincue défaite
elle reste plantée là
dans sa cuisine impeccable
et on l'imagine vieillir
On souhaite que quelque chose lui arrive,
n'importe quoi
qu'elle deviennent folle et s'enferme
dans son placard accroupie parmi ses
robes
qui l'entourent comme autant de peaux
mortes après la mûe
ou bien
qu'elle explore la noirceur urbaine
au volant de la voiture de son mari
séduisant des adolescents
les baisant sur la banquette arrière
on imagine même
son corps inerte
abandonné dans le fossé
à la périphérie de la ville

SQUIRREL:

The red lights danced across the ambulance walls, playing with shadowy medical instruments. The paramedic's dark blue form interrupted the swirling. He was sitting over my mother, his eyes on the translucent mask covering her nose and mouth. He was calm, like this was normal. For him it was normal, I supposed. I pretended it was normal for me too.

When we got to the hospital, my little sister and I walked to the waiting room and sat down on brown vinyl chairs, arranged in tidy rows. She lay across two of them, her head in my lap, plastic butterfly barrettes holding back her limp blonde hair. We were still wearing our party dresses, mine lemon yellow satin, homemade. My friends would be at their after-prom party by now. My sister and I had taken a taxi home, and found mom on the bedroom floor.

My arms were bare. It was cold, despite being June.

A middle-aged woman with a grave face and bright lipstick walked tersely past us to the pay phone. "He's headed into surgery," she told the receiver. "Yes, I will. Thanks, Joan. I'll call you back as soon as I hear. Try to get some sleep." Grey double doors opened for her, and closed again behind.

The nurse called us over to her desk within the hour. My sister held my hand. "Your mother has overdosed. We have pumped her stomach. She'll be staying here in hospital. Do you have her health card with you?" I did. "She's going to be fine," she said, with a quick glance at my face.

We walked back across the room to the pay phone. I dialled slowly, reading the numbers off the card shoved into the crack in the top of the black phone casing. "Can I have a cab at the Emergency entrance?" I asked. "Ten minutes," said a thick French accent.

We sat back down on the brown vinyl to wait for our ride home.

[Pause]

How many times do I have to pick myself up out of the dirt? How many times do I have to dig down and find in the pit of my stomach some will to overcome? How many times do I have to convince myself that I am more than my experiences, that I am as worthy a human being as the girl with the loving family, or the academic with the straightforward career? Don't tell me everything happens for a reason. There is no reason for rape or torture. No reason why the structure of my universe – or anyone else's -- should be filled with events designed to maim or destroy. And so I sit, in one tree or another, and watch the caterpillar make pretty patterns in the leaves, and watch the bird swoop down and stab it with its beak. I watch the world. And I grieve.

[MUSIC: IN A WEEK]

RABBIT:

I have to tell you—I did leave the garden. That moment, years ago—I was looking through the open gate when honestly, I don't know how it happened but suddenly I found myself shooting across the road how I wasn't hit by a truck I will never know but before I knew it I was haring across the park running faster than I had ever run, my legs feeling stronger than they had ever felt my leaps longer and higher than they had ever been. And in no time I was on the other side of the park, in a world I'd never known. "What have I done? And what am I to make of this strange feeling of ...euphoria?"

There's one last stanza. I have to warn you, it's a hard one. But I guess freedom is hard. You have to make choices. You can't have it all.

The woman in this poem offends us
with her useless phone and the persistent
smell of onions we regard her as we do
the poorly calculated overdose
who lies in bed somewhere
not knowing how her life drips
though her drop by measured drop
we want to think of death
as something sudden
stroke or the leap
that carries us over the railing
of the bridge in one determined arc
the pistol aimed precisely
at the right part of the brain
we want to hate this woman

but mostly we hate knowing
that for us too it is
moments like this
our thoughts stiff fingers
tear at again and again
when we stop in the middle
of an ordinary day and
like the woman in this poem
begin to feel
our own deaths
rising slow within us

La femme de ce poème nous répugne
de son téléphone inutile à l'odeur
persistante d'ail
elle est comme la victime d'une
surdose
prise entre l'hallucination et le trépas

Nous voulons considérer la mort
comme une étape définitive
arrêt cardiaque
saut final de la balustrade
pistolet à la tête
nous voulons haïr cette femme

mais en réalité nous haïssons savoir
que pour nous aussi
ces moments inspirent les doigts
rigides de l'imagination
qui tentent de saisir le mystère ultime
comme la femme de ce poème
nous ressentent lentement
inexorablement
la mort s'insinuer en nous

SQUIRREL

Teaching English 10, I've been up late most nights, planning the next day. The relentless 70-minute cycle again and again—that's a lot of acting. Plus all the feedback on their work—real feedback—the sort that tells them I care. There's not enough time left to sleep, or care for my own child. I'm exhausted.

But the final straw, what's killed my dream of being the best high school teacher I can be, came the day the VP pulled me aside in the hall before class. There'd been an incident at lunch. Kevin, sweet Kevin, had his face bounced against the school's brick wall. Once, twice, a third time. It was a First-Nation boy who'd done it and he was now suspended. These things happen. It is part of a closed society of teenagers surging with hormones. Kevin was bruised, his nose all scraped and bloodied, but fine--fine enough to attend his regular afternoon classes. My guidelines were to play it cool. Let it blow over, the last thing the school needed was to draw attention to racial issues, and it wouldn't help Kevin to remind him of his powerlessness. All period, Kevin was stoic and the class proceeded as planned. when the two First-Nation girls who sat at the table to the left snickered and pointed, I gave them an extremely sharp look. And that was it.

[pause]

I failed them. I failed them all. And I was angry. Because the boy that hurt Kevin, he was angry. And in my experience, anger usually has a good reason. That First-Nation boy had plenty good reason. And tell me, how did suspending him for three days help him or society in any itty bitty way? Not only was our government and our school system failing him, right here, right now, but our vice principal failed him... and I failed him.

We also ...all...failed...Kevin. Pretending it is okay to get your head smashed against the wall, as though life should go on as normal after that. Why was it brushed off as regular teenage experience? Since when is that sort of violence okay? And the girls laughing at Kevin. Picking on someone lower down the hierarchy. What experiences had brought them to that? And what am I to do about it? I cannot support a system that ignores these problems. And I don't have the energy or the power or the guts to change it. I feel guilty for abandoning the Kevin's and the Josh's of the years to come. Leaving them there. But I can't do it. No more high school teaching for me. I am off to find a new tree. On the hunt, once again, for a place I might call home.

RABBIT

After I got Sandra's email I couldn't go to school, I hated the thought of my office, I wanted to get as far away from academia as possible. I went to the public library downtown, looking for innocence, for the garden of my early life. It has a wonderful childrens' section upstairs. Dorrie and the birthday eggs and Thinniver Vetch—that's what I needed—some real magic. And I read all morning—I even found a Dorrie book I'd never read before!

After a salad lunch I wandered around and found myself downstairs in the drama section. I remembered that book Squirrel had been going on about. *True and False*. It was there, waiting for me.

There's a big bay window upstairs that reaches right down to the floor, where the kids stretch out on the carpet and read while the traffic and the day roll by down below. I spent the rest of the day curled up in an overstuffed armchair by that window, and read the book right through.

The actor in learning to be true and simple, in learning to speak to the point despite being frightened, and with no certainty of being understood, creates his own character; he forges character in himself. Onstage. And it is this character which he brings to the audience, and by which the audience is truly moved

L'acteur, dans son apprentissage à être simple et vrai, à parler en dépit d'être effrayé et sans l'assurance d'être compris, crée son propre personnage; il forge un personnage en lui. Sur scène. Et c'est ce personnage qu'il présente au public, et par qui le public est réellement touché

The next day I was at the library sharp at 9. This time I sampled random pages but whenever I read the word actor I replaced it by teacher just to see what happened.

The teacher in learning to be true and simple, in learning to speak to the point despite being frightened, and with no certainty of being understood, creates his own character; he forges character in himself. In the classroom. And it is this character which he brings to his students, and by which his students are truly moved.

SQUIRREL:

The audience will teach you how to act... The classroom will teach you how to obey, and obedience in the theatre will get you nowhere
Part of the requirement of a life in the theatre is to stay out of school...

Le public vous enseignera comment agir...
La classe vous enseignera comment obéir, mais l'obéissance au théâtre ne vous mènera nulle part. Une partie des exigences d'une vie de théâtre est de rester loin de l'école.

I once asked a group of teenagers on a scale of 0-5 the degree to which high school taught them to conform. Without hesitation, they said 5; then proceeded to explain why conformity is good and necessary, how they need to learn to conform to succeed in society, in their future jobs. So I guess I disagree with Mamet, and though it makes me ache to admit it, the teenagers have a point. [pause].

For me, the constraints of school were enabling. My teachers, with all their imperfections, were the closest I had to caregivers. School gave me unique experiences and challenges, and most importantly, despite my circumstances, it gave me a golden ticket – a way out. But I was forced to pay dearly for that ticket with precious pieces of my selfhood. And that, I cannot forgive.

RABBIT:

About a year ago I read an article in the Globe. This guy Cameron had a graduate degree in Chemistry and went on to be an actor. Here's an excerpt:

"The science served me well, and it was also to my detriment," said Mr. Cameron, who is rehearsing for the premiere of *Trouble Cometh* at the San Francisco playhouse. "I had the kind of mind that allows me to be a scientist and I brought that approach to the theatre. I would break down a scene and a character. It was very critical, very analytical. It took me a long time to let a piece of art, a poem or a sculpture just wash over me," he said.

That's what happened—the poem just washed over *me*. And what a relief it was just to let that happen, to feel it running free along my tongue.

We are trained in our culture to hold our tongue and control our emotions and to behave in a reasonable manner. So to act, one has to unlearn these habits, to train oneself to speak out, to respond quickly, to act forcefully irrespective of what one feels, and in so doing to create the habit not of "understanding" but of giving up control and, in doing so, of giving oneself up to the play.

Dans notre culture, nous sommes entraînés à tenir notre langue, à contrôler nos émotions et à nous comporter de façon raisonnable. Pour jouer, il faut désapprendre ces habitudes, il faut s'entraîner à parler tout haut, à répondre promptement, à agir avec force indépendamment de ce que l'on ressent, et, ce faisant, créer l'habitude non pas de « comprendre », mais d'abandonner le contrôle et ainsi de s'abandonner à la pièce.

SQUIRREL:

I am a writer, I am a researcher, I am a student, I am a teacher. I work in offices of all kinds filled with people who think deeply about doing good for others. And I cannot cry when I am sad. I cannot shout when I am angry. I cannot dance when I am happy, and I cannot be too different OR I'm called crazy. And yet society craves authenticity. We want real people, whole people. We are drawn to those among us, the artists and the actors, who somehow seem to have retained more of themselves than society demands. We try to drink deeply from these people— from their art, from the entertainment of their presence. Are we even aware anymore, of what controls are upon us, or where they come from—from within or from without? Do we truly know, any of us, who we really are?

Stanislavsky said that the person one is is a thousand times more interesting than the best actor one could become... You are not one of the myriad of interchangeable pieces, but a unique human being, and if you've got something to say, say it, and think well of yourself while you're learning to say it better.

Stanislavsky a dit que ce qu'une personne est est mille fois plus intéressant que le meilleur acteur que quelqu'un pourrait devenir... Vous n'êtes pas qu'une partie de la myriade de parties interchangeables, mais un être humain unique et, si vous avez quelque chose à dire, dites-le, et pensez du bien de vous pendant que vous apprenez à le dire mieux.

RABBIT:

I was away from the garden for a long time—many years, many confusing years looking for what? For myself, for the self I had lost. Or never had? I met some squirrels. They captivated me. They were exciting. I wanted to belong to their world. I hung out with them for many bewitching years—years when I turned my back on the ones I loved—not even knowing that *they were the ones I loved*.

Now, I have started to understand the dimensions of my loss. That it's not about climbing trees, that I never managed to do, or scooting along the power-lines, that I never managed to do, it's simply about being who I am. And with courage and imagination the resources have always been right here, in the garden.

Courage and imagination: two sides of the same coin. Sometimes I have trouble telling them apart.
David Mamet tells them apart

It is the actor's job to make the performance *truthful*. When the performance is made truthful, the work of the writer is made something more than words on the page, not by the inventiveness but by the *courage* of the actor.

C'est le travail de l'auteur d'écrire une pièce intéressante. C'est le travail de l'acteur de rendre une performance authentique. C'est lorsque la performance de l'acteur est authentique que le travail de l'auteur devient plus que des mots couchés sur du papier, non pas par l'inventivité de l'acteur, mais par son courage.

RABBIT: not by inventiveness but by *courage*.

SQUIRREL Rabbit -- You've adopted my book!

RABBIT: It's about me too. Remarkably so. My classes are interesting and they are correct. But they are not truthful. They are only half-truths.

SQUIRREL: But your poem is truthful and you had the courage to give them that.

RABBIT: Have you seen my poem?

SQUIRREL: My students told me about it.

RABBIT: Sandra fired me.

SQUIRREL: Nonsense—she didn't fire you—she just had to put out the little fire you started in one of her classrooms. The smoke will clear—it will all blow over.

RABBIT: I feel ashamed.

SQUIRREL: You should be pleased. It's a wonderful poem.

RABBIT: Really?

SQUIRREL I loved it.

RABBIT: But not right for *math* class...

SQUIRREL *Perfect* for math class! The very thing.

RABBIT: You should have been there! When I finished they just sat there looking at me with wide eyes. And then the questions? What did the woman do? What about her kids? Was it a real person—someone I knew? And then in the halls they talked and talked... And their friends came along and asked them what's up, and they started trying to tell the story in their own words, trying to explain it, trying to make sense of it. And little Jessica was over there by herself as usual, sprawled in the floor at her locker, feverishly writing and writing ... it was a poem called "The girl in this poem."

SQUIRREL: That's wonderful, Rabbit.

RABBIT The Ministry want us to do more critical thinking, communication, stuff like that. Maybe that's the way to go. Maybe we could think of it as a kind of new math.

SQUIRREL No rabbit. It's not math—it's poetry. Don't try to take over the world. *But just because it's not math doesn't mean it doesn't belong in a math class.*

RABBIT: Yes! I need to tell Sandra that. She could use a few triple negatives in her life.

SQUIRREL You need to return her calls. She's worried about you—she cares.

RABBIT: I need to tell the *parents* that too.

SQUIRREL You can't blame them. They want little Christopher and Nicole to be surgeons and MBAs. So they want math class to be about math.

RABBIT: They don't even know what math is. They think it's fractions.

SQUIRREL You need to tell them what math is.

RABBIT: I'm a coward.

SQUIRREL You're a rabbit—you've evolved to be risk-averse. That's how you survive.

RABBIT: I want to do more than survive. [Bows his head in shame.]

SQUIRREL: [looks thoughtfully at Rabbit, nodding] Rabbit? Tell me about the woman.

RABBIT: The woman in the poem.

SQUIRREL: Do you worry about her?

RABBIT: Yes. Yes I do.

SQUIRREL: Is there any hope?

RABBIT: [pause] I looked in Mamet. I thought I might find something helpful.

RABBIT:

Your character, onstage or off, is molded by the decisions you make: which play you do, whether or not to pursue employment in commercials, in sex films, in violent films, in second-rate movies, whether or not to treat yourself with respect, whether or not to prepare for your scene, for your play, for your film, for your audition. The ideas, organizations, actions and people you support and dedicate yourself to, mold and finally *are* your character.

SQUIRREL:

Certainly the weak would like you to believe that character is a costume that can be put on or taken off at will. And from time to time we'd all like to believe it. But that doesn't make it true.

Votre personnage, sur scène ou en dehors de la scène, est fait de toutes les décisions que vous prenez : quelle pièce vous allez faire, si oui ou non vous allez continuer à faire des contrats pour des publicités, pour des films de sexe, pour des films violents, pour des films de série B, si vous allez vous respecter, si vous aller préparer vos scènes ou non, pour votre pièce, votre film ou votre audition. Les idées, les organisations, les gens que vous soutenez et pour qui vous êtes dévoué forgent et *sont* finalement votre personnage.

Certainement, le faible aimerait vous faire croire qu'un personnage est un costume qui peut être revêtu ou enlevé à volonté. Et, de temps à autre, nous aimerions tous le croire. Mais cela n'est pas vrai pour autant.

RABBIT: The woman has a long journey ahead of her. To complete it, she will have to struggle with the awful arithmetic of rabbits. That in spite of everything we have been taught, one-half rabbit, plus one-half rabbit, does not equal one whole rabbit. I struggled with that every minute I was gone. I'm such a slow learner.

SQUIRREL: I think you've learned A LOT this week. And so have your students: because - of - your - poem.

RABBIT: I'm going to school tomorrow. To tell Sandra about the woman—and about *True and False*.

SQUIRREL: Her reaction might surprise you.

[MUSIC Bird on a wire]

RABBIT: How about you? Are *you* okay?

SQUIRREL: Yes, I think I am. Thank you.

Rabbit: [gives her an appraising look] What now?

SQUIRREL: I'm still looking for my garden. Maybe someday I'll find it. A place to call home.

And it'll have a big tree in it. Or two. Or three.

Peter comes down aisle with backpack. Judy starts walking when he's got his papers out. Talks silently to him, settles beside him and takes out her papers and book.

[Peter looks over at Judy, smiles a welcome, and goes back to his notes.]

JUDY: I don't start conversations on trains. I'm too shy.

PETER: [Looks at her inquiringly.] That comment is worthy of Bertrand Russell.

JUDY: [giggles uncomfortably.] It's because I'm reading this book. [She takes it out of her lap].

PETER: Good heavens. *True and False!*

JUDY: Interesting title isn't it.

PETER: It's also a very interesting book.

JUDY: Do you know it?

PETER: I do. I love it.

JUDY: It's awesome!

PETER: Wow. This is interesting. The book is not well known. Are you an actor?

JUDY: No. I'm a writer. Judy. [puts out hand to shake]

PETER: I'm Peter. Hi. (shake) So what kind of writer are you?

JUDY: Creative? I guess you could say.

PETER: [smiles] That sure fits with the book.

JUDY: What do you do?

PETER: I'm a mathematician.

JUDY: What kind?

PETER: Theoretical biologist. Mathematical models?

JUDY: What kind of models?

PETER: Evolution of behaviour. Game theory.

JUDY: Game theory?

PETER: See if your behaviour affects the fitness of someone else, and you both want to do the best you can, you're essentially playing a game. We use game theory to understand such behaviour.

JUDY: Who's your hero? workwise

PETER: My hero?

JUDY: I often ask people who their heroes are.

PETER: Hmm. Well I guess mine is a guy called Bill Hamilton.

JUDY: A theoretical biologist?

PETER: Yup. He died some years ago, tragically

JUDY: He caught malaria in the Congo, while studying HIV. A fitting death, he would have thought.

PETER: You've got to be kidding. How on earth did you know that?

JUDY: Bill was my PhD supervisor.

PETER: Bill? Bill Hamilton? At Oxford?

JUDY: Yeah.

PETER: That's incredible.

JUDY: [smiles] It's certainly a coincidence.

PETER: It's structure! So, you studied under Bill Hamilton. What do you do now? Where are you now?

JUDY: At Queen's.

PETER: Queen's? So am I! In Biology?

JUDY: No. I'm doing a second PhD--in Education.

PETER: Wow. This gets crazier and crazier. 'Cause sometimes I feel that's what I need.

JUDY: What do you mean?

PETER: I've been doing some curriculum development and I need to know what works and what doesn't. I tend to count on my intuition for how the students are making out, and that's not exactly how research works. What about you?

JUDY: I'm still looking for my intellectual home. I'm thinking a Faculty of Education might be it.

PETER: Well there's a ton of good questions to answer. In fact, I'm writing an education talk right now.

JUDY: Oh? What's it about? [looks inquiringly as if trying to read papers]

PETER: I'm not sure.

JUDY: Now that sounds interesting.

PETER: I want to talk about something real, something *authentic*, trouble is, it always turns out to be essentially about me-

JUDY: Fundamentally isn't it always about me?

PETER Well, I guess. [laughs] That's the fundamental dilemma of altruism as you may well know. [pause] But we live in such a self-absorbed culture—I want to get away from that, I want to get outside. But there's something keeping me here (hand at his chest). I don't quite understand it.

JUDY: You could say *that*.

PETER: What?

JUDY: What you just said. About the something keeping you here. It's probably important. Might even be universal.

PETER: I'm not really comfortable talking about myself, especially to a large audience. I think I'd find it embarrassing.

JUDY: Me too, but that's why I like writing. I can say whatever I want and pretend no one is listening. It's not hard to do.

PETER: I've been wondering about an allegory.

JUDY: Mmm. That could work. How about animals? Animals are fun. You could be a praying mantis, or a tall lanky giraffe.

PETER: I'm a rabbit.

JUDY: [nods] How so?

PETER: Well. I'm very nervous always looking sideways never quite at ease and I don't take risks. I love carrots and I have strong hind legs and when I was born my godmother gave me a silver napkin ring with a rabbit on it. In fact I'm carrying it with me—for inspiration. Here.

[Rabbit fishes it out of his pocket. Gives it to Judy. She handles it in awe.]

JUDY: Wow. This is wonderful. You're-lucky to still have it.

PETER: I've been a rabbit all my life and I've always wondered about others. Do you think everyone is some sort of metaphoric animal deep down?

JUDY: [looks at him squarely] I think I might be a squirrel.

PETER: [pause, nods] Hmm. What makes you a squirrel?

JUDY: well, I'm nervous, never at ease, I look after myself – everything good that has ever happened to me has been because I worked hard and went out on a limb to make it happen. But I've had a lot of bad luck, too, I've met a lot of dogs and when things go wrong, I move on. I've quit more than my share of jobs. I also don't have a godmother. And I never did.

PETER: Wow

JUDY: What's life like for a rabbit?

PETER: I live in a garden surrounded by a limestone wall. There's a park across the street.

JUDY: [*pause—looking at peter*] I live in that park. And I've often seen you in your garden. It looks lovely and peaceful. But I wish there wasn't a wall there.

PETER: [looks at her a moment.] Wow. I have to say I am conflicted about the wall. It protects the garden...

[Looking at one another]

JUDY: It keeps me out.

PETER: It keeps me in.

[MUSIC/ where the streets have no name]

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